

APPLAUSE FOR PLAUTUS

A Collection of Three Comedic Plays
based on the work of Titus Maccius Plautus

by
Katie Bufithis Oberlander

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DEDICATION

*To the students, faculty, and staff of Norwood School
in Bethesda, Maryland, where this play was first produced.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

Here is a collection of three comic adaptations of works by the Roman playwright Titus Maccius Plautus. The first play is "The Pot of Gold," in which Euclio, a miser, goes to great lengths to hide a secret fortune from his family and neighbors. In "The Brothers Menaechmus," identical twins who were separated at birth cause confusion when one of them coincidentally arrives in their hometown on the day of his brother's wedding. The collection concludes with "The Haunted House" as a clever servant concocts a tale of the supernatural to aid his master in marrying a slave who is promised to an arrogant captain in the Roman army. Plans go awry, misunderstandings abound and hilarity ensues as classic plots from ancient Roman comedies are transformed to appeal to actors and audiences of today.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (Each play calls for 20 actors.)

POT OF GOLD (3 m, 3 w, 14 flexible)

LAR FAMILIARIS: A household god.

EUCLIO: A miser.

STAPHYLA: Housekeeper to Euclio.

PHAEDRIA: Euclio's daughter.

LYCONIDIES: Phaedria's suitor.

MEGADORUS: Euclio's wealthy neighbor.

EUNOMIA: Megadorus' sister.

MEGADORUS' SLAVE

EUCLIO'S SLAVE

THREE SLAVES

FOUR SINGING GIRLS

TWO COOKS

TWO LAMBS

THE BROTHERS MENAECHMUS (7 m, 4 w, 9 flexible)

ACTOR: Delivers the prologue.

PENICULUS: A portly "parasite." (*Freeloader who loves to eat.*)

MENAECHMUS: Son of a prominent family who doesn't want to be married.

SLAVE MENAECHMUS: His twin brother who was lost at sea, he's a slave to Harpax.

MESSENIUS: Father of the twins.

PLANESIUM: Pretentious mother of the twins, she speaks in a distinctive sing-song voice.

GRIPUS: Menaechmus' slave.

PALAESTRA: Menaechmus' fiancée.

AMPELISCA: Palaestra's mother.

ARCHTURUS: Palaestra's father, a captain in the Roman Army.

HARPAX: A slave trader, Ampelisca's brother.

CASINA: Slave to Harpax.

INNKEEPER

INNKEEPER'S WIFE

COOK

PRIEST

FOUR SLAVES: Also double as soldiers.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE (6 m, 5 w, 9 flexible)

BALLIO: A slave trader.

DELPHIUM: One of Ballio's slaves.

PHILOLACHES: A young man in love with Delphium.

TRANIO: Philolaches' clever slave.

SCALPA: Ballio's ill-tempered wife.

THE CAPTAIN: Conceited captain in the Roman Army.

TWO CAPTAIN'S MEN: Serve the Captain.

TWO MUSICIANS: Play a musical fanfare every time The Captain's name is mentioned.

THEOPROPIDES: The elderly father of Philolaches, he repeats himself a lot.

GRUMIO: Theopropides' servant.

TWO GUARDS: Serve Ballio.

LADIES 1, 2 and 3: Scalpa's friends.

SLAVES/MEN 1, 2 and 3: These roles double as Ballio's slaves and his friends.

The plays may be performed as a set or individually. Each play runs about 20 minutes long.

Production Notes

Roman playwright Titus Macchius Plautus (254 - 184 BC.) used stock characters and comic plots to poke fun at the society of the day. His plays, written in verse, were often farces marked by cases of mistaken identity and opportunities for slapstick, and he popularized character types such as the braggart soldier and the sly servant.

Actors in Plautus' plays wore masks with exaggerated features. If you wish to use masks in your performance, they can be easily constructed using newspaper and papier-mâché, and then painted. Actors can be costumed in traditional Roman togas. A typical ancient Roman stage consisted of a city street scene with three houses in the background.

THE POT OF GOLD

(AT RISE: A street outside the dilapidated house of a miser, Euclio. There is an altar near the doorway where the household god Lar Familiaris sits. As the play begins he steps forward and addresses the audience.)

LAR FAMILIARIS: Welcome, kind onlookers. In case you don't know who I am, let me briefly introduce myself. I am Lar Familiaris, the guardian spirit of this house you see before you. I have been in charge of this house for many years now, and have looked after it for the present owner, Euclio, his father, and his grandfather. And through these many years I have guarded a secret. It was the grandfather who put into my care, a long time ago, a large sum of money, a pot of gold. He hid it in the base of my altar, and, miser that he was, never revealed his wealth to his family, not even on his deathbed. His son died a poor man, and left this house to Euclio, who is, similar to his relatives, a nasty, bad-tempered pauper. But, he has a beautiful daughter, Phaedria, who brings me daily offerings of flowers, wine and incense. A few weeks ago I decided to reveal the pot of gold to Euclio, in the hopes that he would use the money to bring happiness to the poor girl. But, so far the cheapskate has hoarded the money, never letting it out of his sight for more than a few minutes.

STAPHYLA: *(Offstage.)* Oh mercy, mercy Master!

EUCLIO: *(Offstage.)* Get out, get out, you old shrew!

LAR FAMILIARIS: Here comes the master now, shouting as usual. He's throwing his old housekeeper out of the house, probably so he can check on his treasure, to make sure it hasn't been stolen.

(LAR returns to his altar. EUCLIO and STAPHYLA enter from the house.)

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EUCLIO: Keep moving, Staphyla! I want you to go and stand as far away from my house as possible, and don't come back in until you are called. Hurry, now, hurry! Can't you walk any faster?

STAPHYLA: I'm moving as fast as I can, Master. My old bones aren't what they used to be. What have I done, I'd like to know? Why must you torture a long-suffering woman?

EUCLIO: Go on, go on or you really will suffer! Far, far away from my door! I can't stand the sight of you, you old busybody!

STAPHYLA: But why do you have to turn me out of the house?

EUCLIO: Why? Why? I don't have to give you reasons! Just look at her, that's what she calls walking! A tortoise can move faster than you! Go on now, shoo!

STAPHYLA: *(Melodramatically.)* Oh, how I wish the gods would end my life! Death would be a lot better than working for you!

EUCLIO: *(To the audience.)* I know this busybody was snooping around the household this morning! Perhaps she's found my pot of gold! I must go inside and make sure that it's still there. Oh, my pot of gold, my lovely money! *(HE gets so excited that he turns and hugs STAPHYLA.)* My glorious, precious treasure!

STAPHYLA: Oh, sir, I didn't know you cared!

EUCLIO: Not you, you snooper! I know you've been up to no good! Now, don't you dare move while I'm inside. *(HE exits into the house.)*

STAPHYLA: It seems the master's lost his mind! He's turned me out ten times this week already! I don't know what's come over him. He stays awake all night, pacing the floors, and then spends the whole day sitting indoors muttering to himself. I'll not put up with this much longer, I tell you! I'll find some way to get revenge for the vile way he's treated me!

(EUCLIO returns and speaks to the audience.)

End of Freeview

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